

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-08-11/enforcer-for-slain-mexican-mafia-member-stabbed-to-death-in-l-a-county-jail>

Enforcer for slain Mexican Mafia member stabbed to death in L.A. County jail

By [Matthew Ormseth](#) Staff Writer Aug. 11, 2023 3 AM PT



Joseph Hutchinson was found stabbed to death in Men's Central Jail on Aug. 4.

(Irfan Khan/Los Angeles Times)

An inmate was stabbed to death last week in Men's Central Jail, an incident that authorities suspect may represent more fallout from the killing of Michael Torres, [a Mexican Mafia member who controlled](#)

[rackets](#) in the Los Angeles County jails.

L.A. County sheriff's deputies were conducting a security check at the downtown Los Angeles lockup the evening of Aug. 4 when they found Joseph Hutchinson, 51, suffering from stab wounds in a cell that he shared with another inmate, said Lt. Art Spencer of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Homicide Bureau. Hutchinson was pronounced dead at the scene.

The circumstances of Hutchinson's death remain unclear, but it comes just one month after Torres, 59, [was killed on the yard at California State Prison, Sacramento](#). A week later, a woman said to be associated with Torres was shot to death in his mother's home in San Fernando.

Like Torres, Hutchinson was a longtime member of the San Fer gang. Nicknamed "Capone," he sold drugs for Torres, collected his money and [made sure his orders were followed behind bars](#) and on [the streets of the San Fernando Valley](#), according to testimony in a 2014 murder trial and interviews with law enforcement officials and gang members, who requested anonymity because they are not authorized to speak publicly and are concerned about reprisal.

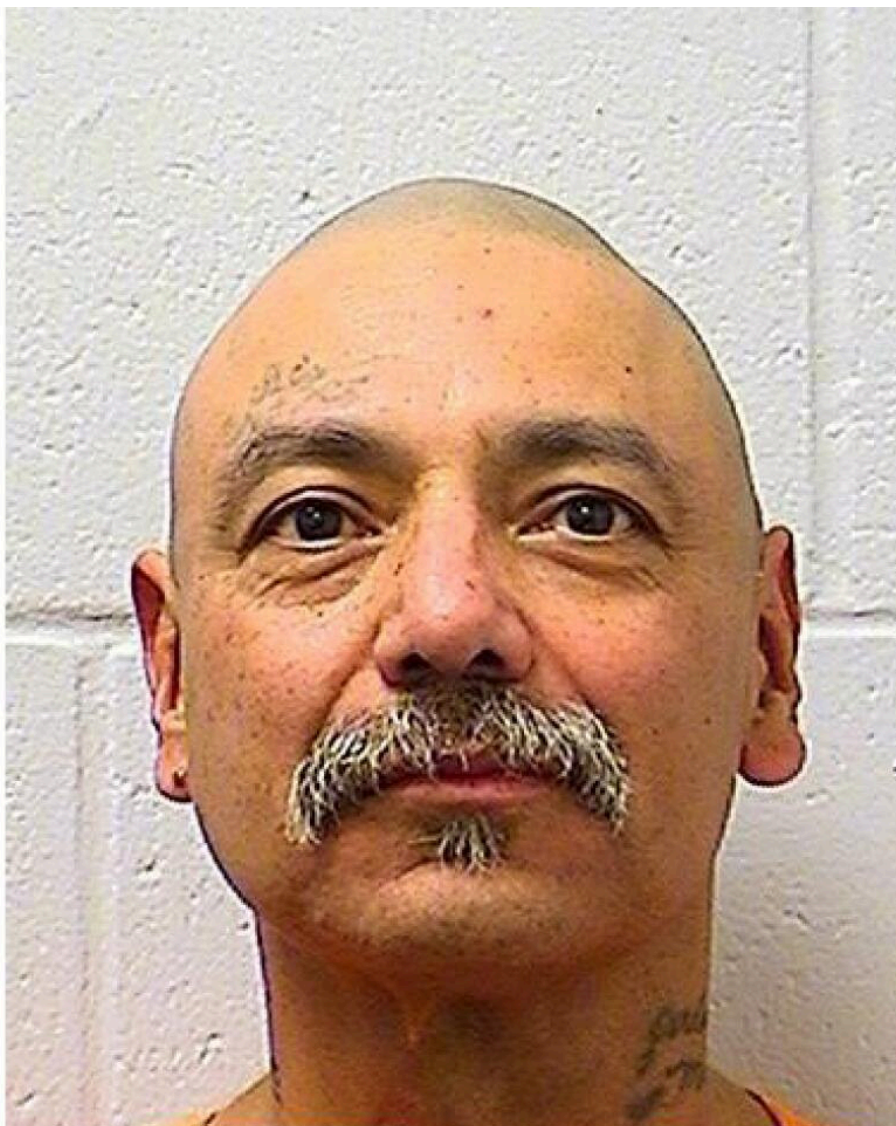
As part of a crew led by Torres' longtime "secretary," Virginia "Big Virge" Moor, Hutchinson played a role in a murder plot that led to the death of an innocent man who was mistaken for a delinquent debtor, court records show.

The last time Torres was out of prison, he called a meeting in 2002 with all the leaders of San Fernando Valley gangs at the Painful Pleasures tattoo parlor in Granada Hills, a detective testified at Moor's trial in 2014. According to the detective, Torres announced that if he ever went back to prison, Moor was "going to be his voice."

After he was jailed in 2003, Torres relied on Moor to handle his money and relay his orders. Once a month, Moor, a 400-pound woman who traveled everywhere with an oxygen tank, mask and two Yorkshire terriers, would collect \$1,000 from every gang under Torres' control, the detective testified.

Hutchinson was one of Moor's enforcers, the detective said, tasked with tracking down drug dealers to "make sure they were paying into Michael Torres."

One of those dealers was Brian Stansfield, who told detectives that after getting out of jail in 2004, he was looking for fast money. "I guess I was hoping for the dream, Scarface, you know," he said, according to a transcript of the interview.



Michael Torres, a member of the Mexican Mafia, was stabbed to death on July 6 at California State Prison, Sacramento.
(California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation)

Stansfield met Moor's husband behind bars, which led to an introduction to Hutchinson. Stansfield knew of his reputation, telling police: "In the system, all you hear is Joe Hutchinson, Joe Hutchinson, Capone." Stansfield said Hutchinson put him in contact with Torres' supplier, Ramiro "Rome" Alatorre, who gave him an ounce of methamphetamine on credit.

Stansfield said he sold the drugs and paid back Alatorre, but struggled to turn a profit because he also had to pay a tax that Alatorre was kicking up to Moor. "I was making nothing," he recalled. "So I say, 'You know what? F— this, dude. I'm not doing this s— no more.'"

Stansfield moved to Palmdale and started selling drugs for a different crew, he said, but Hutchinson tracked him down at a Walmart, telling him, "You owe me money." His debt was \$1,800, which he refused to pay. "I said, 'F—, I don't know where you're coming at me like that with. If you disrespect me like that again, you threaten my life, I'll come after you, boy.' And that was it. And then he said, 'We'll see about that.'"

Meanwhile, Torres' secretary was also demanding payment. "Virgie was calling my phone all the time," Stansfield told police, "asking me, 'Hey, when you going to pay me my f—ing money?'" Once, she found him in Palmdale and tried to run him down with her truck, chasing him for three blocks, he said. "This lady has a tank on. She can't breathe. But she can chase you in a damn truck. And I mean, I was just scared."

Seven years passed. Moor was recorded telling inmates in the county jails to look for Stansfield, who was lying low, according to transcripts of jail calls. In 2011, he went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, where he ran into a member of the San Fer gang, Humberto Gastelum. Stansfield "just really wanted to know what Virge thought of him or what people were saying about him," Gastelum testified.

Word got back to Moor, whose brother-in-law called Gastelum and asked him to come to a house on Aztec Street in Sylmar, Gastelum testified. A case of mistaken identity would lead to the death of an innocent man that night.

Stansfield, who identified himself as half-white, told police he got the nickname Casper the Friendly Ghost in jail. Peter Ziehler, who lived in a garage behind the house on Aztec Street, was also called Casper.

Gastelum testified that Moor's brother-in-law, Matthew Moor, wanted him to verify the man living on Aztec Street — Ziehler — was the same Casper he'd seen at the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

Gastelum saw a thin white man step out of the garage. He didn't recognize Ziehler, but asked, " 'Hey, aren't you Casper, the one I know from AA?' And he looked at me like, 'What are you talking about?' "

As Gastelum walked back down the driveway, he passed Matthew Moor and another man, Arthur Ramirez, who were walking toward the garage. For some reason, Gastelum did not say the man in the garage wasn't Stansfield, the Casper he'd met at Alcoholics Anonymous.

"No words were exchanged," he testified.

Figuring they were going to "talk to him, do whatever they were going to do," Gastelum said he lighted a cigarette and waited in front of the house. Matthew Moor and Ramirez returned and gave him a ride home, he said.

Later that night, a neighbor biking to 7-Eleven for cigarettes saw what "looked like a wheelchair at first," he testified. "It was a guy in a wagon." He heard someone say, "Help. Can't breathe." Hearing the sound of a man "gurgling," he eased Ziehler out of the wagon and saw "all this blood."

"I believe I heard a, 'Thanks,'" the neighbor recalled.

A deputy medical examiner testified that Ziehler bled to death from a shotgun wound to his backside and a gunshot wound to his chest.

Virginia Moor, Matthew Moor and Ramirez were convicted of murdering Ziebler and sentenced to life in prison in 2014.

Hutchinson, who was not charged in the case, was already being prosecuted for helping Eulalio “Lalo” Martinez run the drug trade and other rackets in the county jails. A Mexican Mafia member from Rosemead’s Lomas gang, Martinez had taken control of the jail system after Torres was sent to state prison in 2007, prosecutors said.

Martinez used Hutchinson’s inmate trust account to send and receive money from drug sales and “the kitty,” a pot of commissary items collected from Latino inmates that is then resold within the jails, prosecutors charged.

Martinez was awaiting trial when he died of a heroin overdose in 2013. Three years later, Torres again seized control of the county jails, using contraband cellphones to run them from his Northern California prison cell.

Hutchinson was convicted in 2016 of conspiring with Martinez to commit murder, extortion and money laundering and was sentenced to 31 years to life, but an appellate court reversed the judgment in 2022. Hutchinson was awaiting a retrial when he was killed.

Spencer, the sheriff’s lieutenant overseeing the investigation, declined to identify Hutchinson’s cellmate. No charges have been filed in connection to his death, he said.

Three weeks earlier, Stephanie Rodriguez, 38, was found shot to death in a home on Kewen Street owned by Torres’ mother.

Torres’ niece, Evelyn Torres, 34, was arrested at the scene and later charged with Rodriguez’s murder. She has pleaded not guilty and is due back in court next week.

Torres was attacked the morning of July 6 by two inmates, identified by prison officials as Ray Martinez, 49, and Juan Martinez, 47. Both men, who are not related, were already serving life in prison for murder. They have been held in a restricted housing wing of California State Prison, Sacramento, pending the investigation into Torres’ death, authorities said.